

Eaquals | Community of Practice

Summary Report: The Socially distanced Classroom

Meeting Dates: 25.11.2020 & 26.11.2020

Meeting leads: Lou McLaughlin, Chris Farrell

Eaquals Member Representatives: Atlantic Language Galway, AVO Language & Examination Centre, Bridge Mills Galway Language Centre, Centre of English Studies, Emerald Cultural Institution, Future Learning, Good Hope Studies, IH Dublin, IH London, IH Malta, Liden&Denz, Oxford House Barcelona, Terraki Foundation Schools, ULearn.

1. Update on current classroom situation, country-specific

Those present provided a brief insight into what the socially distanced classroom looked like in their context. This section focused on the set up, procedures and protocols that had been put in place to facilitate face-to-face teaching to take place again once restrictions had been lifted.

Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to work Covid forms for all teachers, and similar ones for students. Students sign these forms every Monday confirming they are fit to attend class. • Students wear masks. Teachers wear masks or visors in class. • No kitchen/canteen use leading to a lack of “collegiality”. • Congregation outside only. • School closed at 1.30, afternoon classes online. • U-shape classroom is gone. • No photocopying. All course books and e-copies of material. • Exam students particularly resistant to not having paper copies. • Keeping an eye on device sharing as a potential issue. • Extra support person who does work for the teachers (like getting materials together).
Malta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desks changed to flip table ones, • Studentss have their temperature checked upon arrival.
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facemasks used when moving, but not at desks. • No visors used at all. • Compliance not high.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No photocopying. • Masks at all times, even in street. • Edmodo used instead of emails for material sharing. • Focus on transferring what we learned online back into the classroom.
South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No photocopying. • Masks at all times for teachers and students. • High compliance as a result of strict initial measures in place during lockdown. • Smaller group classes but dependent on room size. • Use of outside space by teachers and students employed and appreciated.
Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class days staggered (Monday and Tuesday face-to-face, rest of week online for some classes). • Thermal imaging on arrival. • Parents had to give permission for students to return to F2F. • All wearing masks, no visors. • Hand sanitising outside classroom. • Online lessons viewed as ‘better than SDC’ by some in this context.

United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower class, staggered class times, • Bigger desks were trialled but abandoned as students felt that the rooms were cluttered, it was claustrophobic. Now, they have rolling desks with the floor marked in tape to show students the areas they should stay in. • Students have face masks, there are wipes and spray in order to clean classrooms after use. • Teachers can only stay within a particular area in the classroom. • Teachers wear visors.
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2. Challenges with teaching and learning in the socially distanced classroom

The discussion then identified the main areas of difficulty when teaching in the socially distanced classroom. These areas were discussed from both the manager and teacher viewpoint. It was noted that the challenges were common to all, irrespective of location. The following identifies the five key areas of difficulty as classroom management, impact on syllabus, monitoring progress, material management and pastoral care. Each area has additional specific challenges included.

(a) Classroom Management

- Students are all facing forward which impedes natural flow. Both teachers and students feel constrained.
- Difficulty with communication (depending on space and difficulty in scheduling space).
- Difficulties connected with wearing facemasks in terms of understanding pronunciation, particularly at lower levels.
- Extra work involved in setting up and making sure students adhere to protocols.
- No mingling activities permitted so more difficult to plan for communicative activities.
- It is a challenge to provide a good pace to lesson and to manage groups who are working for hours sitting in same place with same group of students.
- Ironically have to resort to tech to be able to make things more communicative.
- Harder on everyone as students are in the same groups with the same teacher for long periods.

(b) Impact on syllabus:

- Teacher have realised that they can't cover what they would normally do.
- Less input externally in terms of what the students would normally encounter outside of the classroom situation.
- Less opportunities to practice what has been learnt with peers, with general public etc.

(c) Monitoring progress

- Progress test were already digitalised and so this hasn't created a lot of difficulty for many.
- Students making most of 1:1 personal feedback.
- Concern around lower levels are taking longer to progress.

(d) Materials Management

- Materials are all managed digitally so need to ensure everyone has access to this and feels comfortable with online use.
- Use of smart boards essential.
- Students are bringing their own devices so need to be able to access materials through online links, participate in group work where possible etc.

(e) Pastoral Care

- Students are showing much high level of anxiety and pastoral care is taking precedence over academic concerns from the students point of view.
- Important to have constant reminders and updates for students to keep them connected.
- Essential to bring students in on decisions so as to have them on board and ensure they will comply with procedures and protocols.
- Monitoring / yard duties to ensure social-distancing and mask-wearing is taking up time for management and teachers.
- More severe initial lockdowns did train students in terms of compliance which has made it easier to monitor.

3. Supporting the teacher in the socially distanced classroom

All present agreed on the need to work towards providing support and resources for managers and teachers working in the socially distanced classroom. The starting point for this discussion were the areas of challenge identified above and it was felt that the community of practice should look to provide support around different ways of engaging with students in this new environment, to provide ideas for classroom management and the creative use of space and to provide ideas on lesson planning.

4. Community of Practice – Next steps

The next series of meetings will provide a discussion forum for teachers and an opportunity for them to share ideas and resources with colleagues. Each meeting will address one specific issue from the following which have been identified:

1. Classroom management
2. Use of tech solutions
3. Lesson planning

The ideas and resources brought to these focused meetings will be collated and made available to all Eaquals members as ready to use resources.
